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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a strategy to enhance communication competence and self-determination among a group of African-American high school students enrolled in the West Philadelphia High School through the production of a community newspaper. The ethnographic data presented in the paper originates from a 6-month pilot study, beginning with the implementation of a journalism/language arts course and culminating in the publication of the first issue of the paper. Results indicated that community newsmaking permitted the African-American high school students to enhance their self-determination by extending their influence within their social systems through communicative action, the shared making and dissemination of knowledge claims about themselves and their environment. Descriptions of the 6-month project demonstrate the students initially responded as they do to many other school phenomena--with considerable resistance. The most promising site for the development of affirming relationships and for the practice of new skills appeared to be the small group. (A list of 79 references is attached.) (Author/RS)

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Newsmaking, a tool for self-determination: Urban high school students publish a community newspaper

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Abstract:

Newsmaking, a tool for self-determination:
Urban high school students publish a community newspaper

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This paper describes a strategy to enhance communication competence and self-determination among a group of African American high school students in Philadelphia through the production of a community newspaper. The ethnographic data presented here originate from a six-month pilot study, beginning with the implementation of a journalism/language arts course and culminating in the publication of the first issue of the paper. (The full two-year project is undertaken as part of the author's doctoral dissertation.)

The study is informed by Jurgen Habermas' (1989) theory of communicative action (that the sharing of meanings and common situation definitions leads people to form social groups and enables them to take collective action for the benefit of those groups), and by Anthony Giddens' (1984) view that people can influence the social systems in which they exist through the construction and contesting of knowledge claims. This paper asserts that community newsmaking permitted the African American high school students observed in this project to enhance their self-determination by extending their influence within their social systems through communicative action, the shared making and dissemination of knowledge claims about themselves and their environment. The paper highlights several journalistic practices which may be particularly useful in this process, and describes several sites of conflict which call for further understanding.

I. Introduction

Self-determination is a phrase used to describe the ability of individuals and groups of people to make meaningful interventions in their own lives. Social scientists frequently associate the concept with people who take steps to change the ways they perceive themselves or are perceived by others. Communication strategies may play a central role in the process. This paper describes a strategy to develop self-determination among a group of African American high school students in Philadelphia through the production of a community-focused newspaper. The demonstration project seeks to enhance students' self-determination by raising their consciousness and increasing their communication competence through a number of practices involved in the construction of news.

In a global cultural environment where communication is increasingly associated with power, a rising generation of American youth is poorly positioned for sociopolitical and economic self-determination. Students in urban settings, where traditional education strategies often do not reflect the challenging realities of their daily lives, may end their high school years with inadequate language and literacy skills, unequipped to communicate effectively with groups other than their own peers. Many have not been trained to interact positively with prospective employers, college recruiters, business people, public agencies, elected representatives, or individuals of other cultural backgrounds. At the same time, many find their customary communication practices devalued by the mainstream culture.

Scholars of social change stress the importance of community as a site for political mobilization and self-determination; it is at the community level, Jan Servaes (1990) notes, that the problems of daily living conditions are discussed, and interdependencies between groups with common goals may be established. Yet urban public school education rarely engages young people in solving the problems of their own neighborhoods, identifying local information sources, or taking part in community organizing efforts. Nor do students learn to question the representations of their worlds made by self-interested others, such as politicians and the commercial mass media. In short, the school experience may leave young people without the skills necessary to participate in community life and without an understanding of how to support personal, group or systemic change.

While all urban youth in an information-poor environment are at risk, the constraints of race and class make these conditions especially threatening for African American youth, William Junius Wilson (1987) argues. The school experience can have profound negative impact on the future social mobility and economic status of urban blacks:

> ...inner city schools train minority youth so that they feel and appear capable of only performing jobs in the low wage sector...students in ghetto schools are not encouraged to develop the levels of self-esteem or the styles of presentation which employers perceive as evidence of capacity or ability (p. 103).

According to Oscar H. Gandy Jr. (1988), the increasing trend toward the commoditization and privatization of information also victimizes the urban poor, especially blacks and other ethnic minorities, by denying them access to information resources which they could use to improve the quality of their lives. The mass media, Kirk Johnson (1991) observes, spews forth an endless stream of misinformative images of blacks, contributing to the psychological as well as physical endangerment of young African Americans. Under these conditions, while communication competence is important for any young people who would convince potential employers of their worth or affiliate with others for political action, it is vital to young African Americans who would challenge the social roles already established for them by culturally reproduced stereotypes.

This paper offers an exploratory application of Jurgen Habermas' notion of communicative action to Anthony Giddens' theory of social structuration. Habermas (1989) asserts that communication constructs social relations. He argues that the sharing of meanings and common situation definitions leads people to form social groupings and enables them to make collective efforts (which he names "communicative action") for the mutual benefit of group members. Giddens (1984) analyzes the centrality of communication to the complex human social networks he defines as social systems. He asserts that human actors influence their social systems by making meaning through knowledge claims (signification), imposing meaning through the mobilization of resources (domination) and generating acceptance of rules governing meaning (legitimation). The newsmaking demonstration project described here was initiated to enhance the self-determination of high school students by extending their influence upon their social systems through communicative action - in this case, the production and dissemination of knowledge claims about themselves and their shared environment in a community-focused newspaper.

While one cannot make claims about the long-term effects of such a project after only six months, a description of our initial experiences in the process may be useful to other communication scholars. The preliminary data presented here are derived from participant observation conducted during the 6-month pilot phase of a two-year project; this project is undertaken in support of a dissertation at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania. During the period described in this paper, which ran from January - June 1992, a community journalism/language arts course for 10th graders was developed and implemented, and a first issue of the newspaper was produced. (The course will be taught to a group of 11th graders in its full-year phase, which will run from September 1992 - June 1993, and four issues will be produced.)

II. Reviewing the Literature

A. Knowledge Production and Communicative Action

Any information-gathering enterprise has the potential to challenge the traditional positivist view of knowledge as a set of messages generated by legitimated authorities and passively acquired by receivers. The traditional view, whether observed in the "banking model" of education (Paulo Freire 1970), in the mass media (as in the "magic bullet" or "hypodermic" models of early mass communication theorists), or in other social institutions, posits the existence of a universally experienced physical world which can be measured by experts. It also accords real-world properties to the knowledge claims of socially dominant groups, and devalues claims by other groups (Lana Rakow 1989):

> s a consequence of the general currency of the culture being created by only certain segments of society, knowledge from other sources is "senseless," has no meaning, because what is considered information or knowledge makes sense within the logic of the very system that created it... "subjugated knowledges" (Foucault's term, 1981) are those from other groups and other contexts that are disqualified as inadequate because they fall outside the dominant definition of reality.(p. 167).

Under these assumptions about knowing, learning is seen as a condition of reception, not creation. The school, as a legitimated institution for the socially mediated acquisition of knowledge, becomes "a house in which the students are invited to assume a passive attitude in order to receive the transference of the existing knowledge, without reflection on the very possiblity of the creation of this knowledge (Freire, 1980, p. 66)." The increasingly concentrated mass media also contribute to the view of knowledge as an externally imposed

condition. L. Wallack (1989) sees the commercial mass media as offering a "narrow range of ideas that generally support the existing sociopolitical relationships in society, in spite of the large number of media outlets" (p. 365). As the viewer or reader is excluded from creative participation in the mass-mediated cultural environment, Freire (1973) says, he or she is manipulated "to the point where he believes nothing he has not heard on the radio, seen on television, or read in the newspapers. He comes to accept mythical explanations of his reality (p. 34)."

Habermas (1989) offers an oppositional reading of the construction of knowledge by describing it as a communicative group process. People participate in social relations through communication, he asserts; speakers continually define and redefine the contents of their worlds together, creating a space where "every new utterance is a test: the definition of the situation implicitly proposed by the speaker is either confirmed, modified, partly suspended, or generally placed in question" (p. 167). "Communicative action" takes place when people are able to arrive at consensual interpretations of situations and events, and coordinate their actions through these shared views. Speakers form communities, strengthening the integration of their social groups; they are no longer "primarily oriented to their own individual successes (but)... pursue their individual goals under the condition that they can harmonize their plans of action on the basis of common situation definitions" (p. 286). As elaborated by Gandy, communication creates "a community of interest," a common bond, where the group's concern is the advancement of all of its members (Gandy 1989, p. 21).

In a communicative model of knowing, knowledge claims are understood to be discourse situated in social contexts. Kenneth Gergen (1988) describes such presentations of information as "invariably not events (or things) in themselves but descriptive renderings of events... what counts as fact in this case is determined not by what there is, but by the particular line of interpretive discourse to which one is committed" (pp. 38-39). Here, the sciences are seen as explicitly social enterprises which valorize the knowledge claims of socially dominant groups through communal process. Knowing is a social relationship with other individuals and with the world, wherein people "organize themselves, choose the best response, test themselves, act, and change in the very act of responding" (Freire 1973, p. 3).

Though people have historically organized themselves into groups or communities through communication, the mass media have broadened our view of the social unit referred to as community. Where such a social system was once recognized mainly by its "local elite (with) local institutionalized patterns for controlling social change" (Morris Janowitz 1967, p. 200), today community frequently refers to a shifting collection of consensually held norms and values, shared by diverse individuals, and mediated by meanings exchanged, not face to face, but through a communication technology. Geographic locality is no longer necessary when there is discursive commonality. Communities may self-define themselves whenever people seek a joint remedy for external conditions or problems (D. Lager 1982, M. Spector & J. Kitsuse 1987), or when they recognize common objectives "and become committed to working together to achieve these objectives" (J. Carpenter 1981, p. 8). In this view, communities are discursively formed whenever people create and share common situation definitions, whenever they consensually articulate their needs, goals and grievances.

B. News as Knowledge Production

In the communicative act of news production, various knowledge claims are presented and tested. These claims have the potential of linking participants into communities of people sharing common situation definitions. Each news story involves a subjective rendering of events into knowable and discussable accounts embedded in social

relations (Gaye Tuchman 1978). When the mainstream news media define certain putative conditions as social problems, they highlight certain social institutions as the legitimate identifiers of cause and remedy for these problems (Charles Salmon 1990). Rakow (1989) calls this a self-perpetuating cycle: "Information produced by organizations in a position to produce information justifies those organizations' right and ability to do so (p. 167)."

Community-oriented communications media serve a different function. Rather than legitimating power structures within the larger large social system, their content is frequently aimed at "building and maintaining local traditions and identifications" (Janowitz, 1967, p. 61). These media help groups coalesce around issues and gain access to information otherwise restricted by the social stratification of the larger society (C. Smith-Gaziano 1983, Carpenter 1981, Janowitz 1967). By representing a range of activities and aspirations not expressed in the mainstream press and by emphasizing the common values of the people participating in them, community newspapers can be "influential in raising and crystallizing local issues" (Carpenter 1981, p. 28). In Giddens' view (1984) of communication, such local channels may offer people real potential to change the amount of influence they exert within their social systems.

In keeping with the findings of Kirk Johnson (1991), Teun van Dijk (1988) and others, many of the African American teenagers participating in this project believe themselves to be seriously misrepresented by the images reproduced in the mass media and educational materials. Ethnic minorities are routinely portrayed in the U.S. and western European press as the cause of social problems: they are presented as people who "cause difficulties, make constant demands and are never satisfied, and generally are in need of 'our help'" (van Dijk 1988, p. 225). In the United States, the claims made about young black teenagers by the mass media's mostly white newsworkers (K. Wulfemeyer 1989) are even more negative: young people see themselves portrayed, not as valued members of the mainstream society, but as fringe-dwellers, exotic deviants, the perpetrators and victims of street crime (Johnson 1990). They are defined as a social problem but denied any input into that construction; as Freire (1973) notes, "the ordinary person is crushed, diminished, converted into a spectator, maneuvered by myths which powerful social forces have created. These myths turn against him; they destroy and annihilate him" (p. 6).

C. Educational Interventions

A public school was chosen as the site for this intervention because the school is a communication-based social system with a large constituency. However, the institution of school as it exists in Western society today is also a problematic agent of social control which poses serious constraints to education for a democratic society. School is seen as instrumental in the reproduction of structural inequities based on socioeconomic class (Pierre Bourdieu 1977, S. Bowles & H. Gintis 1976, Freire 1973, Henry Giroux 1981, Paul Willis 1981), race (Gandy 1988, Henry Levin 1972, Wilson 1987), and gender (M.F. Belenky et al 1986, D. Holland & M. Eisenhart 1990) Contemporary observers are particularly critical of urban schools, where large portions of the student population are deemed members of the "underclass" by virtue of their separation from what Wilson (1987) calls "the organizational channels of privilege and influence" (p. 136). By failing to build communicative bridges across cultural differences in behavior, norms and values, such schools block students' access to potential avenues of social mobility, reinforcing race and class subordination.

Numerous educational interventions seek to change the structures, practices, and outcomes of the public school through social relations. Levin (1987) and Gandy (1989) point to the viability of cooperative learning groups or teams, which create "a sense of identity, commitment and community" (Gandy 1989, p. 21) in their participants. Believing the school experience to be directly related to work experience later in life, Giroux (1981)

argues that learning must involve interaction between students and workers in the community outside the classroom; through this type of contact, "students may be able to understand that communication and dialogue are not merely pedagogical devices for classroom use, but also represent valid political tools to be used in the struggle for a better society" (p. 85). Levin (1972) notes the efforts of some African American communities to increase local adult participation in the schools: "The constituency of the school must necessarily include all the people of the community, since the needs of the students cannot be divorced from the context in which they live" (p. 205.)

This paper has been most influenced by those interventions which combine community learning with applications of communication technologies. Research by Ira Harkavy & John Puckett (1991), Kenneth Hefner (1988), John Hochheimer (1989), Jay MacLeod (1991), and Elliot Wigginton (1985) stresses the importance of community in the lives of young people and valorizes the application of communication skills to community learning.

Serving as the inspiration for numerous educational interventions based on the production of texts is Wigginton's Foxfire project, which began in 1966 and has continued to the present. Working with groups of disadvantaged students at a residential school in the north Georgia mountains around Rabun Gap, Wigginton taught them to research and produce their own ethnographic journal, which became a vehicle for the appreciation and preservation of rural Appalachian culture. The Foxfire project (Wigginton 1985) has tested many of the theoretical recommendations of critical education: treating the community as a source of knowledge, using cooperative learning strategies, being explicit about power relations in the classroom, and emphasizing peer teaching, small groups, and teamwork. While other educators may be unable to replicate Wigginton's personal style, many have been influenced by his emphasis on the combined roles of communication technology and community participation in adolescent learning.

D. Empowerment and Group Process

Many contemporary interventions into the social, educational and political lives of groups refer to the goal of empowerment. A growing body of literature stands ready for citation in support of such assertions (Judy Allen & Donald Barr 1984; A. Bookman & Sandra Morgan 1988; Geri Johnson 1991; L. Nessel 1988; E. Ozer & A. Bandura 1990; Julian Rappaport 1987; T. Wolff 1987; Marc Zimmerman & J. Rappaport 1988; to name but a few). But when the social sciences attempt to reach a working definition of the term empowerment, semantic confusion erupts; psychological, political, emotional, organizational, economic and spiritual phenomena all get described as empowerment, making the term per se a problematic concept at best.

Rappaport (1985) comments, "Empowerment is a little bit like obscenity; you have trouble defining it but you know it when you see it" (p. 17). Unfortunately, this is not true; what is seen and described in the empowerment literature is a wide variety of states of being, feeling and doing: "a process focused on increasing personal control beliefs" (G. Johnson 1991), "a strategy to produce social change," (L. Nessel 1988), "a combination of self-acceptance and self-confidence, social and political understanding, and the ability to play an assertive role in controlling resources and decisions in one's community" (M. Zimmerman & J. Rappapport 1988), and so on.

This author finds the most compelling arguments about empowerment to be situated in theories of group interdependence and communication (as described by L. Arnault 1988; L. Button 1974; J. DeLameter 1979; Erving Goffman 1959; Hawkins, Catalano & Wells 1986; Audre Lorde 1981; Muzaher Sherif 1966; Sherif & Sherif 1974; Georg Simmel 1971; to cite a few). Such research tends to view empowerment as self-determining *action*

related to a specific type of communication behavior. In this view, discourse about shared predicaments or common situation definitions is a form of communication behavior which has been shown to bind speakers into a caring, interdependent "community of interest" (Gandy 1989). The formation of a "community of interest" has the potential to enhance group members' sense of self-efficacy and support the acquisition of communicative skills which in turn increase members' influence in the larger social system, allowing them to take a more assertive role in controlling resources and making decisions in their environments.

Peter Berger (1963) asserts that any process of social change is connected with new definitions of reality: "we acquire our meanings from other men and require their constant support so that these meanings may continue to be believable" (p. 64). When we acquire negative meanings about ourselves, we are diminished; when we acquire affirming meanings, we are enhanced. In a sense, Klaus Krippendorff (1989) says, we converse our worlds into being; "the reality we know is not a given but (is) continuously constructed and reconstructed in discourse with others" (p. 187). In this newsmaking project, both the senders and receivers of the messages produced are seen as participants in a communication community, engaging in dialogue over common meanings and situation definitions. By collaborating on the production of knowledge about themselves and their environment, participants may change the ways they perceive themselves and are perceived by others. As related to communication behavior, then, self-determination can be discerned at social sites where communicants develop and share meanings which increase their influence in their own lives.

III. Methodology

A. Process

This paper is a case study of the first phase of a journalism education intervention aimed at enhancing the self-determination of young African Americans at an urban high school. It describes the practices and processes of the intervention, using data from several ethnographic sources: collected classroom writings of the young participants, personal interviews with students, writings by the classroom teacher, and extensive field notes from my own daily participant observation.

Ethnography, Agar (1986) says, is a form of explanation or description which "mediat(es) two worlds through a third" (p. 19). The researcher encounters a social world and, through the processes of the encounter, learns about that world, makes sense of it and describes it to others. Well-known ethnographies have been conducted in worlds far-flung (Evans-Pritchard's much-quoted and criticized 1940 study of the African Nuer tribe) and familiar (a corner bar in Chicago in Elijah Anderson's A Place on the Corner, (1978).

J. Lofland and L. Lofland (1984) define participant observation as the process in which "an investigator establishes and sustains a many-sided and relatively long-term relationship with a human association in its natural setting for the purpose of developing a scientific understanding of that association" (p. 12). The researcher gathers data by participating in the day-to-day activities of the association in that setting and then designs a descriptive model to enumerate what he or she has witnessed. This method, Becker (1970) notes, is useful for "explaining particular social facts by explicit reference to their involvement in a complex of interconnected variables that the observer constructs as a theoretical model of the organization" (p. 33). Because such observation takes place at a specific site unique in time and space, the model is generally presented as a case study, offering a detailed analysis of its own particular set of conditions while relating them theoretically to a larger social phenomenon.

The Findings section below discusses the data presented here as a case study, while the Analysis section relates the findings to the communication theories of Habermas and Giddens, and to the larger social phenomena discussed in the paper's introduction.

B. Context

The site of the research project, West Philadelphia High School, is a branch of the Philadelphia School District and a federally designated Chapter I high school, with 43 percent of its students from families living below the poverty level. In 1989-90, enrollment was 1,512 students, of whom 99.6 percent were African American, with 52.5 percent male and 47.5 percent female. (Enrollment is higher in 1991-92; this information is not yet available.) Failure rates for English, science and math (grades 9-11) in the year described were 49 percent, 52 percent, and 53 percent, respectively. According to School District documentation, the school's catchment area is "a high-crime locality marked by concentrations of long-term poverty, welfare dependency, high infant mortality, and drug and alcohol abuse."

The high school occupies a full city block on Walnut Street, a main one-way thoroughfare heading west. Its surrounding neighborhoods, once part of the city's upper-middle-class white suburbs, are now made up of economically and culturally diverse enclaves of African Americans, whites, immigrants from Southeast Asia, India, Africa and the West Indies. West Philadelphia is considered to be a high-crime district of the inner city, and muggings, car thefts, drug sales are realities of daily life to most of its residents, whether they live in crowded tenements with boarded-up windows or in the turreted Victorian rowhomes with wisteria trees which still line parts of Spruce Street. The largest employer in the area is the University of Pennsylvania, its campus about a mile from the high school.

West Philadelphia High School's facilities are overcrowded and outdated. Class sizes are large (sometimes as high as 35 students to a single teacher, and teachers may handle five or six classes of this size a day). While corporate grants in recent years have equipped the school with a computer laboratory and a television in every room, some classes are lacking even the most essential resources, such as textbooks, notebook paper and staplers. Under these conditions, some teachers attempt to experiment with innovative methods; some are traditionalists, authoritarian and disciplinarian; and some are jaded and indifferent, falling asleep in class and allowing students to watch music videos on the Whittle-provided classroom televisions. Viewed in these contexts, the school resembles similar urban institutions across the country. For decades, social scientists have questioned the ability of such schools to provide minority students with "the knowledge and skills they need to deal with the social environment" (Douglas Glasgow, 1981, p. 56).

I designed the project as part of my dissertation at the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, and began organizing it after receiving support at the University and obtaining permission from the high school principal, Mrs. Joyce Harrison. In October 1991, I began meeting with Mrs. Carol Merrill, a cooperating member of the faculty at West Philadelphia High School, who had volunteered her classroom as a site for the project. Together we collaborated on a community newspaper curriculum to be taught to Mrs. Merrill's midday 10th grade English class beginning in January 1992. In the six-month pilot phase of the project, the curriculum would include practical experience in interviewing, photography and other aspects of journalism; lectures, group discussions, field trips, and guest speakers; skits, role-playing, and computer instruction. Individual and group student work projects would be developed into a 12-page, community-focused newspaper, which would then be distributed throughout the scool and the surrounding West Philadelphia neighborhoods.

C. Criteria for Success

During the collaborative period, Mrs. Merrill and I shared her experiences as a committed classroom teacher and mine as a print journalist and communication scholar to evolve a series of joint assumptions and aspirations for the project. We found that we shared a belief in the importance of group and community interdependence as an ideal basis for learning and for social life. Mrs. Merrill saw the project as a potential way of making her teaching methods more responsive to students' needs and less teacher-centered, while retaining an emphasis on writing ability and verbal skills. I believed the newsmaking process could motivate students to see themselves as a "community of interest" (Gandy 1989), take communicative action (Habermas 1989), and increase their influence within their social systems (Giddens 1984). Of different ethnic backgrounds (I am a white Jewish woman and Mrs. Merrill is an African American woman), we nonetheless agreed that a learning environment which affirms black culture is an important ingredient in encouraging African American students to achieve self-determination in a white-dominated society. In her paper entitled, "Mutualistic collaboration: When teachers and professionals work together," Mrs. Merrill wrote:

> We both cared deeply about what happened within the 45-minute class, the other 23 hours of the students' lives, and the future of each student. We cared about how they felt, developing their abilities, and preparing them for their future. We were like two mother hens cohabitating comfortably and congenially in one nest for the benefit of our 30 eggs.

During the pilot study, then, Mrs. Merrill and I became aware that we had formed our own community of interest.

While Mrs. Merrill was most interested in improved verbal skills, and I wanted to see students trying to influence their social systems through communicative action, we agreed on a number of additional criteria of general performance. If the project were successful, class members would identify themselves as a group and participate in cooperative efforts and group decision-making. Through familiarity with journalistic practices, they would select, organize, write and edit stories competently, present themselves comfortably to strangers in various community settings; reach basic computer literacy; and take increasing control of the publication. Although the most tangible data produced by the project would be participants' writings and the newspapers themselves, we also agreed that classroom discussions and our periodic shared observations of individual and small group behavior would be sites to discuss and develop further understandings of success or failure as we worked together.

D. Limitations

In such a study as this, we must be careful about conceptual moves from the specific to the general. There are aspects of this experience which may be true of many high school students and teachers, many urban high schools, and many communication researchers - but there are also aspects which are bound to be unique to this particular place, time and observer's voice. I make these descriptions in reference to my own specific experience, while hoping that they may help encourage and inform others, situated in similar and differing contexts.

Additionally, the literature suggests that measurement is generally problematic in empowerment initiatives. Researchers may claim that participants "saw" themselves differently, "learned" to behave in a new way, or were "transformed," but such studies frequently fail to elucidate their criteria for success or their means of measurement. In addition, social scientists often omit explanation of their own inevitably subjective roles in

designing these criteria and measures, or in framing these analyses, even when assuming the clearly interventionist stance of attempting to bring about a desired outcome.

I do not believe that subjectivity undermines the value of interventions intended to enhance the self-determination of their participants, or reports of these interventions. But in order for the paths of our research to be coherent and useful to others with similar intent, we should reflexively situate ourselves in the research process we describe. We must be explicit about our criteria for success, frank about our processes of evaluation, and cautious about making unsubstantiated claims of empowerment. I attempt to follow these stipulations in the Findings section below, which describes the significant themes, both contrary to and supportive of our expectations, which emerged during the 6-month pilot phase of the project.

IV. Findings

A. Us and Them, Part I: Ethnic Group Identity and Resistance

Many of the students already seemed to share the "identification of a common predicament" identified by Sherif (1966) and others as a major facilitator of group identity. From the start, many class members believed that as African American youth they are battling the constraints of a racist society, in school and out. At West Philadelphia High School, where the high school's principal and most of its staff are African American, where murals of Malcolm X and Egyptian kings decorate the walls, this is a complex view with apparently contradictory elements. At the same time students felt the school was widely perceived and stigmatized as a "black school" in the media and the surrounding community, they also believed the school to be part of the network of institutions comprising white-dominated mainstream society.

Thus, some students believed the school intentionally mis-educated them by withholding important cultural information. "We don't study African history in school, we study tailor-made education," a young girl wrote. "The media and the schools fail to tell the truth of what has been spoken or written about blacks." Other students complained about the way their high school was represented by the local news media: "They prejudiced against our school. I guess cause they might think we don't care about ourself. So you know, why should they care about us, why should they give us anything." Another wrote, "This school is almost always referred to as an uneducated, dirty school. Other schools are no better than ours, but they get more recognition."

If identification of a common enemy or predicament ("them") facilitates the formation of group identity ("us"), then this situation offers promise that a news enterprise of this type could readily spark the development of a nascent community of interest among the students. I believe that the first issue of the newspaper can be considered a preliminary example of this phenomenon. Given the opportunity to select and develop their own story ideas for the newspaper, some of the young people suggested and developed stories about Afrocentric educational institutions; the teaching of black history in the public schools; materialism and black-on-black crime; and violent stereotypes of black youth - all issues reflecting their concerns about group identity. Although students eventually chose the name QWest for the newspaper, some of the other names suggested by class members referred to their ethnicity as well: Black Intellectual Brains, Nubian News, From a Black Perspective.

B. Us and Them, Part II: A Teenage Thing?

Often, however, it seemed that another common enemy of the young people was being identified not by ethnic group, but by age. Adults, and the imposed structure of the school and the adult world they represented, were the opposition, whatever their race. The visits of two African American guest speakers illustrated this. When a middle-aged man in

suit and tie tried to address the group, the kids put their heads down on the desks, popped gum, and looked out the window as he talked. But when a young, jean-jacketed man in his early 20s came to speak, he received an attentive welcome, and the young people eagerly asked questions. As in many high schools, resistance to the school and the adults in charge of it was a daily fact of life - in the first six months of my work I observed similar behavior in classrooms all over the school, and heard it described by many an exhausted educator, black and white.

The variety of strategies the kids used to challenge the teacher's authority was energetic and endless, a steady wave of interruptions and a dynamic noise and energy level that could frequently prove exhausting - and was evidently intended to be. Behaviors could be hostile or humorous, but most often took the form of performances aimed at disrupting and amusing the whole class. For example, during a poetry lesson in which students were asked to share incidents of racial prejudice which they had experienced, the teacher shared one of her own. As a young girl, she had been refused admission to a swimming pool at a company picnic. Two students, a boy, T., and a girl, L., took the story and turned it into a mocking song: "I'm goin' swimmin', no you're not," and sang it loudly, over and over, with syncopated head and shoulder movements. The pair repeated this song, and these movements, several times in the next week. More than a month later, T. was participating in a class discussion on a different topic, and toying with a piece of paper as he spoke. Across the room, L. shrieked, pointed to T., and repeated the song - he had been moving the piece of paper to its rhythm, and pushing it off the desk, as the teacher had been pushed away from the swimming pool years ago. The room erupted in laughter.

These performances would diminish when we introduced new material or disrupted the predictable routine of the school day with a class trip or a session in the computer lab, but they never disappeared. The cordial relationships which developed between the teacher, the researcher and some of the students never affected the kids' behavior in the larger group. Some of the students had given me a nickname and told me I was "cool," but when I handed out a quiz one afternoon, E. threatened to vandalize my car and A. loudly promised to "get" me.

In this atmosphere, scholastic participation was seen as a kind of capitulation. Students would walk in late or leave early; some would show up only once or twice a week, and a few disappeared for a month or more at a time. Students who took notes obediently or handed in homework readily could be accused by a chorus of voices of "kissing butt" and seeking favor with the teacher. Classwork was denounced as "lame," "corny" and "boring," and homework was treated as cruel and unusual punishment, with students resentfully demanding "extra credit" for completing routine assignments. Even when completed, assigned work was rarely handed in on the due date, but trickled in slowly over the next few days, a crumpled page at a time. To avoid a "nerd" or "brainiac" image and a put-down by the group, students would carry their assignments stuffed in back pockets or in plastic bags from trendy clothing stores, carelessly slung over one shoulder. They responded to assignments with sighs or defiance. One popular young basketball player came to class every day without his books, and would show fresh surprise and indignation each time the teacher insisted that he go to his locker and retrieve them.

The publication of the newspaper generated a great deal of positive feeling among class members, and we were encouraged by the comments of students who wrote, "I see why the teachers who made all this up wanted me to do my best, which I didn't," and "I think the paper came out great, but I wish that I worked a little bit harder to make it that much better," and "I think certain people need to be more serious and put more interest into the paper," and "Thank you for teaching us even when we sometimes didn't want to get taught." All through the semester, whenever we got the chance to talk with individual

students, or take small groups out of the building on interviews and photography expeditions, much of their "acting out" evaporated. On paper, or out of sight of their peer group, the young people felt freer to respond to adult messages and even to include adults in their communities of interest. At such times, it seemed that the kids moved Mrs. Merrill and me out of a "them" group and into an "us" group. Back in the classroom, however, the game resumed.

C. Groups within the Group

Although high school classes are forced gatherings, we had hoped that a cooperative project and group discussions would teach the students in this class to identify themselves as a "community of interest," a voluntary group sharing a common view of their situation. Our findings were contradictory. Although many students viewed themselves as members of the larger group of African American youth in a racist white-dominated society, they were not inclined to see their English class as a subset of that group. They paid lip service to notions of group responsibility and interdependence ("as young black teens we should respect each other"), but their behavior toward one another in the classroom and outside was often competitive and harsh. One boy commented, "Your peers tend to, you know, maybe try to make fun of what you say, or sometime they just try to make everything blow up in your face."

However, within the forced grouping of the class, there were demonstrations of successful small-group interdependencies. Students were encouraged to form groups to tackle news stories together. Out of the seven initial groups of two or three which were formed, four teams carried out their projects successfully. One of a team of two boys described his experience:

> It felt good, just working with somebody else. 'Cause I liked having company around sometimes, and working together. And usually I used to be a loner and tried to do things myself, not thinking I need anybody to help me. But then you realize, you gonna need somebody to help you sometime and that time was sometime I needed some help.

Within the groups, members divided up the work as they pleased. On one team of three girls, each participant conducted an interview and wrote up her notes, and then one of the group combined the writings. In another group, one girl did the interviews, another performed background research, and a third typed their notes on the computer. A member of this group said:

> I think it's better with more than one person, because if you don't know something then the other person can tell you, and if that person don't know then the other one can tell you. That's why I wanted to work with three people - because I knew it was going to be things that I couldn't do that they could do.

Not all group members were happy with these work arrangements. Another member of this same group wrote later, "When I worked in my group it was like I did all the work, interviews, first draft, second draft, etc." In anticipation of such dynamics, some of the kids preferred to work alone. "I truly believed I would get more done by myself than having to cooperate with others," one said. E., one of the few students who did not complete a news story of her own, said, "when you work with a lot of people, one person out of the group might decide they won't have to do any work and leave it up to the other people." "Sometimes I don't like to work with others because I think they would not think I did enough," S. wrote. L. explained that she worked alone "because I am a very picky person and I knew that I wouldn't agree with the things others agreed on."

About midway in the semester, after the students turned in the first drafts of their news stories, I made copies and distributed them to the whole class. At this point the group dynamic shifted. For the first time, students were able to read each other's work and get a sense of the common interests they shared within the context of the project. Many were impressed with each other's writings, and began to see the possibility of the newspaper as a collaborative project for the first time. In an interview, one boy said,

> At the beginning it was like, people wasn't really interested. Then as we started getting toward the end of the project, they started liking the same ideas and all, started seeing the way other people seen it. I think everybody learned how to cooperate with large groups instead of like, people didn't know. It happened when everybody got their stories together and put it in a little packet. and everybody read the stories and they started realizing which stories were the best and which stories needed improvement.

Students could now choose to continue working on the paper or return to studying literature. (In the pilot study, completion of one issue marked the end of the journalistic focus, but in the full-year phase of the project, emphasis will shift back and forth between the community newspaper and related studies in literature, with an emphasis on shared experience and communities of interest.) Ten of the 30 said they wanted to continue as members of the "editorial board," learning to edit stories and do computer layout. Some said they volunteered for the editorial board because they liked using computers or wanted to improve their grades, but others expressed feelings of group solidarity, such as, "I don't want the class to be short on people and make this whole project useless." One boy said later of his experience:

> It was like people were helping each other. We were looking at each other's stories and making sure that we didn't misspell anything or leave anything out, or make sure that's the right way we going to say it. Having to check behind myself and check behind others, that gave me a great deal of responsibility, so that gave me a sense of helping.

In my journal at this time, I wrote, "I'm beginning to feel hopeful again up in the lab. Here is this group of kids trying, to more or less degree, to do what they are asked, and even taking some interest in it, in pursuit of making a good paper." The editorial board represented our first real sense of emerging group identity within the class.

D. It's a Group! Success Makes for Revisionist Memory

When 3,000 copies of the newspaper were published and distributed throughout the school in May 1992, the students were suddenly the objects of attention and much praise. At that point, the class members suddenly *did* begin to identify themselves as members of a group: the successful and talented students who produced the newspaper! "What I liked about QWest is that it started as a thought and turned it into a production," M. wrote. "A numerous amount of minds combined together to work on one single project." Even though much of this combining was done by Mrs. Merrill and myself, against the resistance of the students, now that the project was done and praise was forthcoming, it was easier for the kids to see themselves as a community of interest:

> The fact that I seen a lot of people reading it, made me feel good about what we did. I didn't think we could do it, but here it is in my hand. I can believe that out of all that hard work we got something thousands of us can enjoy. Thank you for giving us a chance to prove we could do some good if we just WORK TOGETHER!

> Doing the school newspaper QWest was important to me because it gave us black kids of West Philadelphia High School the chance to give our opinion on what is going on in our community. I am proud of myself and my English class.
>
> The whole paper was basically good, the reason being that it comes from all young black students with strong minds.

With group membership now framed as a desirable commodity, it became okay to express solidarity within the classroom. One girl had repeatedly voiced the opinion that the newspaper project was useless and not worth her time, but when she began to voice her criticism in class on the day after the paper came out, she was hooted down by the others. The same adults who had been resisted or mocked before - the principal, the head of the English department, other teachers - were now welcome as agents of approval. Students boasted of being asked by other students to autograph their stories. Heading for a track meet, one girl asked for two armfuls of papers so that she could one-up her rivals: "I'm gonna give it out to them *first*." A boy and two girls indignantly reported that their homeroom teacher had not given out the papers, but had tossed them in his wastebasket, and demanded that Mrs. Merrill set him straight (she did).

Many of the students "revised" their earlier views of the project as an experimental and tedious lesson to fit with the class's new, successful image. Some admitted their previous unwillingness to participate.

> At first I didn't want to do it, I didn't want to do nothing. But after a while I got into it. I was just writing it for a grade. I didn't really think of it as, other people going to see the paper.
>
> I was one of the negative ones who thought the paper would never make it to its completion day. But I think the paper is very outstanding for it being our first experience.

Others apparently forgot their resistance. One boy, who had sat in the back of the room and kept up a running commentary mocking the teacher, the researcher, and the project, now wrote that "this paper could grow into a vast business if the same staff returned to work on the paper next year. KEEP the paper within the same class you started it in." A girl who had refused to write a story at all until threatened with poor grades, now wrote that, "My feelings about this project are all the way positive... This project was a wonderful experience for me, and I know for a few other students. I would like to work on another edition of QWest."

E. Skills and their Elusive Measurement

We had hoped the class would improve students' oral and written verbal skills. Although the intervention aimed at recognizing and enhancing the varying skills of all the group's members, in practice it was the good writers who held sway. Prolific writers tended to receive higher grades and more praise from the teacher, even when they substituted their writing skills for riskier oral communication practices like interviewing. Poor writers felt penalized (and were). One frustrated young man wrote,

> You may think I didn't do nothing, but what I did was not easy for me. Interviewing somebody is hard for me because I speak with a slur and people sometimes don't understand what I be saying, and I didn't never get a good compliment from Mrs. Merrill no matter what I did.

Poor writers were also affected in the area of computer literacy. Time in the computer laboratory was allotted on the basis of who had turned in written assignments, and so developing computer fluency was linked to a student's cooperation with the writing requirements of the class. The good writers tended to have many chances to work in the computer lab, and the poor writers did not. (Computer time will be allotted differently in the full-year phase of the project, to better allow all students computer access.)

The administrative need for grading scholastic skill levels was at odds with some of our harder-to-measure goals of cooperative effort and confident self-presentation. The typical grading rationale values writing over other skills, rewards individual obedience over group effort, and makes little or no provision for rewarding student experimentation or the less tangible communication skills. It is easier to grade a long typed article easily tossed off by an already competent scholar than it is to assess a term's chaotic struggle with a shy student who managed to overcome significant family problems to finish her story. But when we asked the young people themselves what they were getting from the experience, their writings consistently reminded us of the development of other, harder-to-measure skills:

> Before, I never knew I will be able to go and interview someone and get information because I'm a person who do not like to talk much, and going in front someone face and conduct and finish an interview would have made me felt scared.
>
> I think about photography a lot since I got the chance to really show myself that I was able to take good pictures. Everyone I know was complimenting me for my work on the paper and the photography.
>
> This year I feel as though I'm ready for (college) interviews. That is what journalism did for me. I know how to answer questions: even if it's doubletalk the question will get answered and it will sound like I know what I am talking about.
>
> For the first time I felt comfortable working with my classmates. I guess I should open up more, it will be better for me and my grades and the people I work with.
>
> This class helped me with my partnership skills. When I get a job in the future I can work with a partner much easier than I used to.

We believe statements like these constitute evidence that some of the confidence and self-presentation skills we had hoped to nurture through journalistic practice were developing.

F. The Awfulness of Autonomy

The teacher-centered model of education, where information is thrust upon passive students by authoritarian educators, has numerous detractors, but the students themselves seemed most comfortable with this model, and were disdainful of deviations from the norm. One of our goals was to establish a classroom environment which encouraged student-directed learning and full participation in decision-making. But when the teacher refrained from exerting her authority and dominating the class, students often took it for weakness. E. told me, "Mrs. Merrill play around too much. She want everybody to like her. If she wrote up a couple of 'em (disciplinary action), they'd probably be all right. She let them get away with anything."

Nor did the young people appear to value opportunities to make their own decisions. We had encouraged them to take initiative in choosing topics, forming interest groups, interviewing, researching and organizing their news stories in a style pleasing to them, but some were extremely reluctant to act independently. Instead of having to choose her own topic, L. said, she wished we would run the class "like a real newspaper" where reporters are assigned to stories. She believed there was no benefit in choosing what she wanted to learn about herself. Other students, too, asked to be relieved of the burden of making their own choices. D. simply said we should "take the newspaper project out and make things the way they were suppose to do" - a traditional class where the teacher would assign readings and then make the students write about what they had read.

When the students did choose topics that interested them for development into news stories, we were impressed by the range and depth of subjects. In addition to their search for ethnic identity, students were concerned about the impact of drug use in families, teen pregnancy, abusive relationships, and crime. But the students' anxieties about these problems did not automatically create the motivation to seek solutions, either through group action or independent study.

Efforts at participatory decision-making with the whole class were unsatisfactory. In such settings the students' tide of resistance against the teacher extended to each other as well. During group discussions, the louder students would compete for the floor and, once they had shouted everyone down, would deflate and crack pointless jokes. Good ideas would emerge, but the kids would become frustrated at opinions that differed from theirs, and shout the speaker down. Of course, the shyer students never got a chance to speak at all. Even assertive kids would get disgusted by the group's failure to let anyone hold the floor for long; cries of "come on, yall, let her talk," and "listen, you might learn something," could always be heard. In order for group discussions to occur at all, the teacher had to vigilantly impose structure and constantly maintain order by threatening punishment.

Smaller group discussions, however, were far more successful. When the editorial board was formed, members of this group were capable of listening to each other's opinions about the placement of stories and artwork. Small groups of students were cooperative when interviewing visitors, politely asking questions and listening to answers without the competitive shouting. It was evident that the kids did care about their topics and were capable of behaving differently, if we changed the dynamics of the situation so that participation was less socially costly.

Another of our goals was for the students to learn to present themselves comfortably to adults in the community. Given the students' flair for performance inside the classroom, we failed to anticipate that this would be challenging outside the classroom. The students' own interests indicated that most of their potential information sources would be within the African American community, and so most of the anxiety of encounters with potentially unfriendly white people was removed. In addition, many community organizations have a standing practice of making themselves accessible to local school encouraged to set up and conduct their own interviews, and were also provided with the names and phone numbers of professional black journalists who had agreed to give them advice on tackling their stories.

But many of the young people seemed to find the prospect extremely daunting, and could not accomplish these tasks without adult intervention. "We really gonna have to *do* this!," students muttered in dismay during one early session on interview techniques. Permission to schedule interviews during class time and leave the building independently did not serve as incentive for most of the students. Mrs. Merrill and I had to take far more

active roles than we had anticipated, arranging group interviews for some, making telephone contacts for others, and accompanying a few on their interview or research trips. As Ozer & Bandura (1990) observe, "People tend to avoid activities and situations they believe exceed their coping capabilities" (p. 472). We saw a good deal of evidence of this avoidance. Some students expressed their general lack of confidence to each other, as M. described in an interview:

> What I didn't like was the way people was acting towards the paper at first. I mean, people gave negative responses, like, well, the paper ain't never gonna be good. They doubted theirselves, they doubted our whole ability. They like, well the paper won't be good, you know, it's just us, nobody will read it, nobody gon' pick it up.

There were a few exceptions among the more socially confident students. W. set up her own interview with a curator at a local museum. "I thought the interview went very well," she wrote. "I was a little nervous but I explain to him what I was doing and ask him to bear with me." A. contacted a doctor at a family planning clinic, but said that her interview with the woman was frustrating because "we had several interruptions and half the things she said I didn't understand." Others talked to people they already knew - friends, family, or teachers at the high school - but even this could be risky: "The person I interviewed acted like she didn't want to do the interview," J. wrote.

It became clear that some of the basic ingredients of journalistic practice we had asked the kids to accomplish demanded more self-confidence and self-control than most of these 15-year-olds had. Rather than acting as a confidence-builder, these assignments initially appeared to intimidate many of the students. The possibility of students taking increasing control of the publication seemed remote. However, as the semester progressed, the small-group approach seemed useful here too. The kids who left the classroom in twos and threes (in some cases accompanied by myself or Mrs. Merrill, acting as chauffeur and chaperone but staying in the background) to conduct interviews and take photographs seemed to find the experience more confidence-building than did the brave few who ventured out alone. Some of these reported:

> Then there was the photography. That was the most fun of all. We ran around taking pictures, talking to different people, and most of all, learning new things about different points of view.

> When you first meet any stranger you nervous at first, you don't know how to interact, until you actually talk with them and get to know them, and then you feel comfortable. You talking face to face with this person and so you be telling him how you feel, and you know, get his opinions and stuff, and then you start getting into it, and you feel comfortable, he feel comfortable, you act like yall know each other now, and then everything run smoothly.

In small groups, and in the company of adults, the kids seemed more willing to take the social risks of approaching strangers, and they felt less threatened during the experience. If they ran out of questions or were momentarily at a loss as to how to handle a topic or situation, the dynamics of our small groups - the reassurance of peers (without the larger group demand for aggressive self-assertion), the presence of a supportive adult, the absence of a competitive and combative group dynamic - seemed to carry them through the unfamiliarity and put these journalistic practices into the realm of possibility.

V. Analysis

Habermas (1989) asserts that the sharing of meanings and common situation definitions leads people to form social groupings and enables them to make collective efforts for the mutual benefit of the group. Giddens (1984) says that human actors influence the social systems around them by making and sharing meanings, imposing them, and generating rules for their dissemination. The newsmaking demonstration project described here was initiated to enhance the self-determination of high school students by teaching them how to influence their social systems through communicative action - both by identifying themselves as a group with common interests, and by creating and sharing knowledge about themselves and their environment with others in a community-focused newspaper. The findings of the 6-month pilot phase are provocative because they suggest that these goals may be attainable, with some shifts in emphasis.

Although identification of a common enemy or predicament may indeed encourage the formation of group identity and inspire group action, sometimes this process may be costly. Common enemies identified by many urban youth are the school and its educational values, despite the fact that the credentialing and skills offered by the school are required in the job market. The young people involved in this study had participation imposed upon them, as indeed most of their school experiences are imposed upon them. Initially, they responded the way they do to many other school phenomena - with resistance. A public school system seemed a desirable site for this project because it offered access to young people and useful resources, but the pilot study demonstrated that this situation also involved the significant constraints of student resistance.

Some sociologists interpret children's oppositional behavior in schools as a kind of "strategic conduct," a demonstration of their informed understanding of and resistance to the social order which surrounds and controls them. In his work on black youth culture in Canada, R. Patrick Solomon (1992) asserts that such oppositional group identity is part of a dual frame of reference developed by "involuntary minorities," peoples who have been incorporated into a society through slavery, colonization or conquest. In this frame of reference, the behaviors demanded by social institutions like schools are regarded as appropriate only for dominant-group members.

> (Involuntary minorities) have a greater tendency to classify such school requirements as regular attendance, being on time, paying attention in class, doing schoolwork and homework regularly, persevering in one's academic work, and the like as a part of the cultural frame of reference of the dominant group and not for minorities (p. x)

Spencer, Swanson & Cunningham (1991) privilege the peer group in the development of ethnic identity among African American adolescents. They cite Fordham & Ogbu (1986) in arguing that urban minority youth resist demonstrating a scholastic achievement orientation because they consider it "acting white" and a threat to their emergent ethnicity. Earlier, Ogbu (1974) had posited that African American and Hispanic American children refused to assert themselves in school because they were aware that the adults in their families historically had been denied good jobs and wages commensurate with their educations. He interpreted the children's performance as a logical response to low expectations of socioeconomic reward. Such behavior is interpreted as a function of class, not ethnicity, in Paul Willis' 1981 study of white working-class boys in Britiain.

Our experience in this study tends to support a less deterministic view such as of S. Resnick & R. Wolff (1987), who argue that the processes and relationships within social systems are interdependent, influencing and being influenced by each other. In our urban

classroom, students undeniably responded to each other and adults according to individual and group relations of race, class, and gender. Their responses were informed by their own past experiences and those of their parents, and by their anticipation of a constant struggle against discrimination in the future. But they also acted as contemporary adolescents, focusing on self-expression and stimulation in the present moment.

Young people need communication skills in order to be able to influence their social systems by making and sharing meanings (Giddens 1984), and journalistic practice involves the systematic development of many of these skills, both written and oral. Journalism as we know it today emerged from the art of storytelling, an eminently oral tradition. A systematic approach affirming the oral communication aspects of journalism could be a real asset to young African Americans. Coming from a culture which, historically and currently, places great emphasis on oral communication, many of the students in our class were verbally adroit, peppering the air each day with nicknames, word play and spontaneous exchanges of innovative put-downs. They spent enormous amounts of energy wheedling, complaining, inventing excuses, and otherwise trying to talk their way out of the responsibilities of the project. But they never reflected on the beauties or consequences of these skills.

The traditional educational framework does not contextualize or affirm the students' oral skills to them; one young man who easily composed the complex alliterative rhymes of rap songs did not even see his skill as a form of communication (although he did value it as a way to make money). For all the countless hours journalists spend using and interpreting spoken language - to obtain and analyze information, to strengthen the social contacts that guarantee the flow of future information, to prioritize stories during news meetings - little formal analysis exists of the oral aspects of journalistic practice. Such analysis would have been extremely helpful to us in motivating these students through newsmaking.

Traditional pedagogical methods fail to offer a space to value and operationalize non-traditional skills such as cooperative effort, innovation and experimentation. The teacher and the research involved in this project spent many hours discussing what we had witnessed in the classroom and read in the kids' papers, in search of consensus about our methods and results. We were like Donald Schon's reflective practitioner (1983), who

> allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomena before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behavior. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomena and a change in the situation (p. 68).

While the pilot study has encouraged us to move in certain directions and not others, our "reflection-in-action" has not yet been long enough to evolve a full set of descriptives about the development of self-determination among the young people.

We had hoped that classroom decision-making discussions, community interviewing and other experiences of autonomy would increase students' sense of self-efficacy and provide experiences of mastery. But we saw that such tasks require more social skills and confidence than individual students may have, and more self-control than they can display in the large group. In order to be workable for many youngsters, opportunities for independent behavior also had to involve the reassuring presence of supportive adults, the stimulating influence of other teens in small enough numbers to allow everyone a voice, and the necessarily flexible application and withdrawal of adult authority. The excitement of minor elements of resistance (like leaving the school building, or stopping for a soda while "on assignment"), also seemed to help.

However, when these conditions were present, the most promising site for the development of affirming relationships and for the practice of new skills appeared to be the small group. In small groups working together over time, young people were more relaxed than in the dynamic pressure-cooker of the classroom, and felt less of a need to resist adults and their values. Relations here were characterized by a tentative atmosphere of affection and the desire to perform well. Group identification and action were possible. If the groups endured over longer periods of time, it seems likely that group communication skills could be turned effectively toward communicating with the larger social environment.

In summary, the pilot study offered us some clear observations and some ambivalent ones. Obviously, many of the kids enjoyed the attention the newspaper brought them, in the school, in their neighborhoods, and at the various distribution sites. They saw themselves as talented young people capable of producing a message that others could understand and value. They recognized, at least in theory, the importance of working together cooperatively in order to produce something as a group. The adults saw the usefulness of small group process - dozens of instances in which two or three young people interacted with each other and with Mrs. Merrill or me to take risks and accomplish tasks which resulted in affirming experiences. And 10 of the students - some but not all of the editorial board, and others - signed up voluntarily to participate next year.

Some of our observations were inconclusive. After a few weeks of repetition, most of the kids would make an effort to complete the assigned work in the way they thought we wanted it done; but we never knew whether they did this out of fear of scholastic failure or discipline, the desire to excel, interest in the topics, or other reasons. We did not know if the students' writing, self-presentation, and group decision-making skills were actually strengthened by their journalistic experience - their writing at the end of the semester seemed as full of grammatical errors and misspellings as it had been at the beginning. Conducting one or two interviews at most, the students did not appear to have had enough experience to develop lasting confidence in self-presentation. And much of their recognition of the value of working as a group came when the project was nearly over for the summer.

We were never sure if the students came to recognize the importance of written communication, or whether their expressions were imitative attempts to win our approval and, therefore, good grades. And we never learned how to "reach" some of them - the two who dropped out of the class, three who failed to complete their news stories, and others who handed in their assignments but expressed only dissatisfaction with the teacher, the other members of class, and the project.

VI. Conclusions

The goal of the high school community journalism project described here is to enhance students' self-determination by enabling them to use journalism to change the ways they perceive themselves and are perceived by others. The written and spoken words of many of the young participants, I believe, offer evidence of the beginnings of this enablement. At the conclusion of the 6-month pilot phase of the project, I offer several recommendations.

One of the project's strengths may be its fostering of group identity, but serious challenges are offered by students' adolescent behavior and their avoidance of the unknown. Interactions which support group identity will be useful if we are astute in understanding the resistance such identity may create. Many young African Americans already see themselves as a group with a common predicament - living in a racist society - and find fault with the images of themselves proliferated by the mass media. A news

enterprise of this type can indeed spark the development of a community of interest among the students. However, in a setting where relationships are influenced by peer group pressure, youthful acting out, individual and group responses to authority, and unequal relations of race, class, and gender, some young people may also see the news enterprise as representative of adult values, and participation in it a manifestation of "acting white."

Educators and researchers must remain creative, unthreatened and endlessly flexible as young people explore their knowledge of the social roles available to them. Concern over the development of measurable skills is understandable, but must not be allowed to eclipse our awareness of the growth of other very important abilities such as group cooperation, innovation, boundary-crossing and risk-taking. Planned approaches are required, but must be abandoned if they are unsuccessful or better strategies emerge.

Most important, small groups have beens hown to be an important site for change. If new roles and behaviors are intimidating to adolescents in a large group, they are less so in smaller groups. The opportunity to experiment with different roles with a small, sympathetic audience, and with the reassuring backup of adult presence, seems to provide a safe site for the expansion of social boundaries without the sanctions imposed by the dynamics of the larger group or the isolation of individual failure. In the project's future, risk-taking endeavors like group decision-making and interviewing will be approached as small-group enterprises first, before they are treated as either individual pursuits or large group processes.

Students and teachers come together in the classroom from numerous different environments or "lifeworlds." They bring with them diverse life experiences and memberships in a wide assortment of communities of interest, with endless distinctions of "usses" and "thems." In the classroom, the boundaries of these lifeworlds may be reconstructed or reconstituted, but they should not be reified. The resistant classroom behaviors described in this paper disrupted the class, but they were also energetic, creative and fascinating glimpses of the interconnecting social worlds in which the young people live. As we come to know each other in the classroom, we may learn clues for easing these barriers or removing them altogether. Our energies are well-spent in the struggle to understand these clues.

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